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A Literature Review of the Role of Libraries in the Provision of Information towards the Attainment of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to highlight the role of libraries in the provision of information towards the attainment of the United Nation Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) in Nigeria. With the methodology of simple literature review, the paper made efforts to review related literature on libraries' role in the provision of information for development. The relationship between libraries and the Millennium Development Goals was also discussed. Suggestions were proffered on ways libraries can contribute to the achievement of the MDGs. The challenges faced by libraries were also highlighted. Based on the review of literature, the paper provided some recommendations.

Keywords: Libraries, information, development, Millennium development Goals (MDGs), Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight goals that show the eagerness by governments globally to reduce poverty and hunger and to tackle poor quality education, ill-health, gender inequality, environmental degradation and empowerment for peoples of the world. These goals respond to the world's most development challenge. It is argued that the purpose of development is to improve people's lives by expanding their choices, freedom and dignity (Igbuzor 2006). It is thirteen years since the United Nations adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Since the declaration of the goals in September, 2000, little progress has been made towards its attainment in Nigeria. Igbuzor (2006) reports that Nigeria is one of the twenty five poorest countries at the threshold of the 21st century.

The United Nations MDGs recognized the interdependence between growth, poverty reduction and sustainable development so that achieving one of them can be expected to contribute to achieve others, for example, reducing the share of people living in extreme poverty would certainly help to deal with the health and education challenges but achieving health and education goals would also contribute to the fight against poverty (Soubbtina 2004)

Information is a vital tool to development. For any nation to develop, it needs to have and provide relevant, updated and adequate information on food security, democracy, health, education, gender equality etc. Libraries can provide such access to information that would enable people lead gainful lives as they are skilled at acquiring, organizing, offering for use and publicly preserving materials irrespective of the form in which it is packaged in such a way that when it is needed it can be found and put to use (Karki 2006).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of the paper is to exhaustively discuss the role of libraries in the provision of information for the attainment of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The study will specifically

1. highlight libraries' role in the provision of information for development
2. discuss Nigeria's efforts in attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
3. show the relationship between libraries and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
4. Suggest ways libraries could contribute to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
5. show the challenges libraries face in the provision of information for development.

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

United Nations Organization adopted the Millennium Declaration in September 2000 to do all they can to eradicate poverty, promote human dignity and equality and achieve peace, democracy and environmental stability.

The specific goals are to:

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Goal 2: Ensure environmental sustainability

Goal 3: Provide gender equality and empower women

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Goal: 5: Improve maternal health

Goal6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other disease

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

Unegbu and Igwe (2006) posit that since the millennia summit in 2000, the MDGs have received global acceptability as targets for human survival and sustainable development. They have become international standard for measuring the progress and effectiveness of development programmes for national governments.

NIGERIA AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs)

Nigeria is a signatory to the Millennium Declaration of 2000 and committed to achieving the MDGs in 2015. A strategic framework for reaching these goals by Nigeria led to the development of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). Under NEEDS, various policies were made by the government to achieve the MDGs. For example the Universal Basic Education, National Policy on Women, The National Health Insurance Scheme, National Environmental Sanitation Policy, etc. (United Nations Development Program (2010). Chukuuemeka (2009) opines that NEEDS derives from the country's long-term goals of poverty reduction, wealth creation, employment generation and value re-orientation. It is a national coordinated framework of action in close collaboration with the state and local governments and other stakeholders. The equivalent of NEEDS at state and local government levels are State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS) and Local Government Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS). The NEEDS, in collaboration with the SEEDS was expected to mobilize the people around the core values, principles and programmes of the NEEDS and SEEDS. A coordinated implementation of both programmes is expected to reduce unemployment, reduce poverty and lay good foundation for sustained development. Other developmental programmes being pursued by the Nigerian federal government in this regard are the seven-point agenda and vision 20: 20: 20.

In spite of the efforts of the government in pursuing development, Nigeria still fares poorly in the development indices. Igbuzor (2006) notes that Nigeria has retrogressed to become one of the 25 poorest countries at the threshold of the twenty first century. There is apprehension in many quarters that Nigeria will not meet the MDGs come 2015. However, the United Nations Development Program (2010) reports that if Nigeria makes more efforts on all fronts and employs a more equitable and broad based growth, it will meet the goals by 2015.

The achievement of the MDGs by the target date of 2015 poses immense challenges. In spite of the Nigerian government efforts to actualize the millennium goals; the efforts have had minimal impact on the nation's development. With the high poverty levels in Nigeria, it has become obvious that it is

no longer up to the governments alone to find ways of abetting poverty, but that other organizations need to join the fight. As each country looks forward to fulfilling the MDGs, libraries being a catalyst of development needs to take up its responsibility in offering ideas and services for the attainment of the MDGs (Forsyth 2005) The Nigerian government needs the support of all institutions of which libraries are a vital part.

LIBRARY'S ROLE IN THE PROVISION OF INFORMATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

Information has been variously defined. Rubin (2000) views it as processed data capable of being communicated. Information is integral to development. For any nation to develop, it needs to have and provide relevant, and adequate information. Achitabwino (2007) asserts that libraries play a great role in national development through the support they offer to the education sector by supplying relevant information in multiple formats. Saliu (1999) avers that the public library is a key source of information to citizens. Achitabwino (2007) argues that all professionals' skills are products of information dissemination progress through different libraries. Forsyth (2005) insists that libraries are integral to community development as they provide access to information and works of imagination in a variety of formats. Makotsi (2004) stresses that libraries go beyond formal education; they encourage and sustain literacy, and support development. Malekabadizade, Shokrameh & Hosseini (2009) state that the cooperation and assistance of librarians is a basis for any nation to gain development. By this cooperation and the provision of useful information in economic, cultural, social and political contexts, development becomes possible. Krolak (2005) highlights the dynamism of the role of librarianship when he posits that libraries and librarians have evolved to become facilitators of information and lifelong learning opportunities with an emphasis on service, identifying user needs and communicating solutions.

The role of the libraries in the provision of information for development is trite. No nation can be developed without relevant information to drive its developmental sustainability. The business of

libraries is the acquisition, organization, dissemination and preservation of information for development.

LIBRARIES AND MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs)

A library is an agency which engages in the collection, processing, preservation and dissemination of recorded information in the various formats most convenient to its target users (Olanilokun & Salisu, 1993). Emphasising the functions of libraries, Saliu (1999) stresses that libraries assembles information from countless sources and places them at the command of individual user, and supports and sustains individual freedom of enquiry and opinion. Libraries satisfy a fundamental need of society: the need to have the society's record readily accessible to the citizenry, and society continues to need access to organised information more than ever before (Rubin 2000)

The MDGs provide the link between local and international actions towards human centred, wholistic development. Krolak (2005) points out that the MDGs involve working closely together at a global level to achieve a common vision and libraries play a significant role in increasing access to information in support of the inclusion process by building bridges between individuals at the local level and the global level.

Information is an indispensable factor for development. For any nation to develop, it needs to have and provide relevant and adequate information on every issue. Libraries can provide such access to information that would enable people enjoy gainful lives as they are skilled at acquiring, organizing, disseminating and preserving materials in diverse forms so that when they are required, they can be quickly located and utilized. As libraries over the years have been instrumental to community and national development, and the MDGs is about development on a global scale, the roles of libraries in achieving these goals are crucial.

The catalytic roles of libraries as it relates to MDGs are detailed as follows

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

The MDGs emphasize the need to promote development in a balanced, wholistic and integrated way in order to attain development by 2015. Information is instrumental to achieving these goals and libraries have a part to play in supporting and contributing to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Mchombu and Cadbury (2006) argue that information are critical and strategic resources in human development, which includes literacy acquisition and poverty reduction. The rural and urban poor require access to appropriate information to fight poverty, deprivation, and illiteracy and the establishment of libraries rooted in the communities they serve is one way of ensuring that poor and marginalized people have access to information. Forsyth (2005) opines that libraries can help eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by raising awareness, or providing a place where relevant information in appropriate language and formats can be found. Tise (2009) makes the point that librarians could facilitate the conversion of information into knowledge through very rudimentary information services. For example, the librarian would have to merge indigenous knowledge, expertise from developed countries, local conditions and such, and package that information in a format that will be meaningful to the local inhabitants in their quest to eradicate poverty. Provision of information is therefore vital in eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, and libraries are well adept to do this.

Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education

Uhegbu and Igwe (2006) citing Obaji (2005) noted that reports from developing countries often indicate that primary school enrolment keeps dropping, sometimes at a disturbing level. Alokun (1998) opines that mass illiteracy has been one of the factors militating against the achievement of societal needs and the desire for rapid socio-economic and political development of any nation. Forsyth (2005) however reports that various researches have shown that a strong library program can lead to higher student achievement. To achieve universal primary education without school or public libraries being involved would be very difficult.

Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

Gender equality refers to the equality of the genders that ensures that all persons irrespective of gender have equal opportunity to develop their talents (Wikipedia 2009). The prospects for achieving the MDGs are both directly and indirectly improved by enhancing gender equality. Empirical evidence suggests that developing countries with less gender inequality tend to have lower poverty rates (International Poverty Centre, 2008). The fact is that libraries offer secure environments in which women and girls can obtain the information they need to take charge of their lives and influence their societies. Libraries can also help to promote gender equality and empower women when selecting resources taking into account the broad areas of women's work and interests, and the sometimes lower levels of literacy which women have (Forsyth 2005)

Goals 4 and 5: Reduce Child Mortality and Improve Maternal Health

Child mortality relates to the number of children that die out of one condition or the other (Uhegbu and Igwe 2006). The United Nations Development Program 2010 Report on MDGs indicates that there has been some progress in reducing child mortality but efforts need to be scaled up. Forsyth (2005) points out that libraries are places where information to empower communities to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health, can be made available in written, spoken or electronic form. The information could be available in books, pamphlets, audio, audiovisual or web-based forms. Uhegbu and Igwe (2006) suggest that ignorance needs to be tackled in order to deal with child mortality. It is pertinent to note the libraries are the answer to ignorance.

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases

Oyelude and Adepeju (2007) assert that the HIV/AIDS scourge has reached alarming proportions worldwide. Tise (2009) argues that libraries have the potential of being key partners with health workers and health initiatives in promoting the behavioural changes needed to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. Libraries can provide information about all sorts of issues and act as a focal point for the community by hosting local forums where people can talk through problems, such as HIV/AIDS and community health (Makotsi 2004)

Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability

One of the indices for measuring quality living conditions in the contemporary world is sustainable environmental control because good food along side good environment prolongs life (Uhegbu and Igwe 2006). Local libraries can provide information about how to integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs to help reverse the loss of environmental resources (Forsyth 2005). Libraries can purposefully facilitate provision and access to environmental information.

Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development

Matoksi (2004) believes that information and communication technologies (ICTs) have great potential to help bridge the information gap between developed and developing countries. Uhegbu and Igwe (2006) asserts that libraries, whether school, university, public and special have greater responsibilities in the development of a global partnership for development by acquiring, packaging, organizing and disseminating knowledge and experience to Nigerians. Global partnerships include the ability for all to access and contribute information, ideas and knowledge essential in an inclusive information society. By enabling access to information in all formats across geographical, cultural, linguistic and political frontiers, libraries foster understanding and communication, and this brings together some of the ideas for global development (Forsyth 2005)

Suggested Ways Libraries Could Contribute to Millennium Development Goals

Libraries are expected to be in the forefront in contributing to the attainment of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the target date of 2015.

From the review of literature, some ways that libraries can make its impact felt include the following:

1. Raising awareness on the various development issues spelt out in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

2. Providing a place where relevant information in appropriate language and formats on developmental issues can be accessed.
3. Establishment of a strong library program.
4. Selecting resources taking into account the development indicators raised in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
5. Hosting local forums from time to time where people can talk through problems, such as HIV/AIDS, community health, education, civil and human rights etc.
6. Partnering with other agencies in promoting changes needed to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
7. Establishment of branch libraries or information centres rooted in local communities.

CHALLENGES FACING LIBRARIES

Libraries in Nigeria are faced with a number of challenges. These challenges have affected the impact libraries can make on the MDGs. The challenges include inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, inadequate staffing, inadequate facilities etc.

Apotiade (2002) laments that libraries are not adequately funded. Krolak (2005) advises that libraries have to be appropriately funded if they are to be effective and attractive. Another challenge of libraries is poor infrastructure. Krolak (2005) posits that appropriate buildings are needed to provide protection to library materials. He avers that books, computers, and audio-visual materials are very sensitive and have to be protected from extreme weather conditions. Apotiade (2002) agrees when he asserts that most library buildings are dilapidated especially at the local level.

Inadequate staffing is another challenge of libraries. Apotiade (2002) argues that many libraries do not have qualified personnel to run them. Krolak (2005) gave the nod when he asserts that many libraries are run by non-professional staff.

Poor and inadequate facilities have also become an undermining issue for libraries to meet their goals of providing information for development. Apotiade (2002) argues that libraries need sufficient space and facilities to accommodate new types of materials such as computers, CD-ROM etc. Also, adequate space is needed for staff and readers as well.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper has established the relationship between libraries and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It has also shown that the role of libraries in the provision of information for development is pertinent. The eight United Nations Millennium Development Goals (eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achievement of universal primary education, promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, reduction of child mortality, improvement of maternal health, combating of HIV-AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability, development of a global partnership for development), have been discussed with ways in which libraries in Nigeria can be instrumental to meeting them. Challenges that libraries face in provision of information has also been highlighted. Based on these, the following recommendations are made:

1. Libraries should appreciate the fact that they are indispensable in the provision of information for the attainment of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and therefore be in the forefront in its activities and services to contribute to the achievement of the goals.
2. Libraries need to be adequately supported in the form of provision of space and financial resources. Adequate staffing in terms of number and professional qualification needs to be provided also.
3. Libraries should strive to acquire information materials on the Millennium Development Goals and bring the materials to the awareness of library users.

4. Libraries need to be more thorough and determined in running services that would directly impact the achievement of the MDGs: awareness programmes, hosting local forums, partnering with other agencies etc

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